

## A HISTORY OF LEI DAY

The lei known the world over, is a symbol of aloha. Great care is taken into the gathering of the materials to make a lei. After the materials are gathered, they are prepared and then fashioned into a lei. As this is done, the mana (or spirit) of the creator of the lei is sewn or woven into it. Therefore, when you give a lei, you are giving a part of you. Likewise, as you receive a lei, you are receiving a part of the creator of the lei.



ISLAND OF HAWAI'I

Color: 'Ula'ula (red)

Flower: 'Ōhi'a Lehua  
(*Metrosideros macropus*)



### 1927 gives birth to the idea of Lei Day

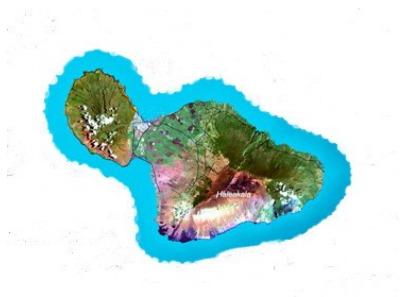
Poet laureate, Don Blanding, thought that Hawai'i should have a day set aside to celebrate and recognize the custom of giving and receiving lei. While working at the Honolulu Star Bulletin, Don discussed the idea with "Kamaaina Kolumn" columnist Grace Tower Warren. She enthusiastically embraced the idea and suggested that the day should be May Day and coined the phrase *May Day is Lei Day*. Inspired by their zeal, Leonard "Red" and Ruth Hawk, a musician, composed *May Day is Lei Day in Hawai'i*. This song resonates throughout every Lei Day celebration in the State of Hawai'i.

The first Lei Day was in 1928 and celebrated at the Bank of Hawai'i in downtown Honolulu. The Honolulu Star Bulletin stated that the throng of people "taxed the capacity of the building." From keiki to kūpuna, kama'āina to malihini - it was a day celebrated throughout the islands.

In 1928, the first lei queen was Miss Nina Bowman. Mayor Charles Arnold crowned Lei Queen Nina Bowman here in Honolulu. Miss Nina Bowman is the sister to Kent "K. K. Kaumanua" Bowman. Photo Courtesy Honolulu Advertiser.



In 1929, May 1 of each year was proclaimed as "May Day is Lei Day in Hawai'i," by Governor Wallace R. Farrington – to be observed "by all true friends of Hawai'i." It is a day of celebration – not a State holiday.



## ISLAND OF MAUI

Color: 'Ākala (pink)

Flower: Lokelani  
(*Rosa damascena*)



In 1931, Lei Day was held at City Hall with a lei exhibit and pageant. The lei of the eight major Hawaiian Islands became the theme for the pageant and a lei queen chosen with a princess representing each of the islands, wearing lei fashioned with the island's flower and color. Photos courtesy Hawai'i State Archive.



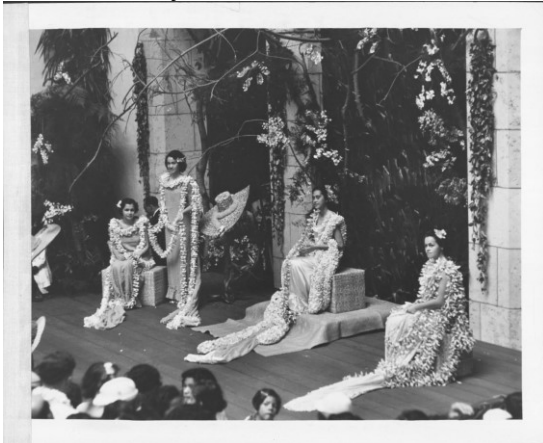
## ISLAND OF O'AHU

Color: Pala luhiehu (golden yellow)  
or melemele (yellow)

Flower: 'Ilima (*Sida fallax*)



Gaining in popularity, Lei Day soon outgrew City Hall where it then became the responsibility of the City's Department of Parks and Recreation. Photos courtesy Hawai'i State Archive.







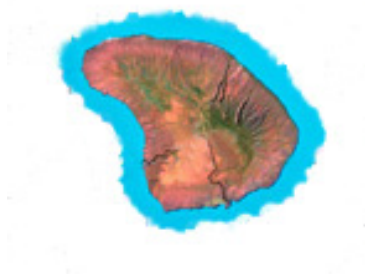
## ISLAND OF MOLOKA'I

Color: 'Ōma'oma'o (green)

Flower: Kukui  
(*Aleurites moluccana*)



The celebration was moved to Kapi'olani Park, where it continues to this day. The program continues to honor the day with a Lei Court, and adult and children's lei contests. Entertainment with many hālau participating add to the day's festivities. Photos courtesy Hawai'i State Archive.



## ISLAND OF LĀNA'I

Color: 'Alani (orange)

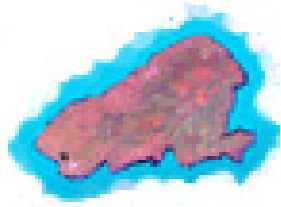
Flower: Kauna'oa  
(*Cuscuta sandwichiana*)



At the adult lei contest, you will see lei exhibited in a variety of colors and methods. Keiki are especially encouraged to learn and perpetuate the artistry of lei making. Awards are given in both lei contests. The theme for Lei Day varies each year. Photos courtesy: Hawai'i State Archive.



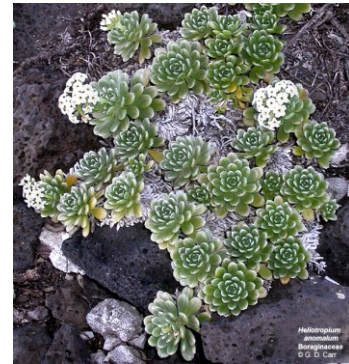
In 1978, Parks began rotating age groups of ‘ōpio, mākua, mākua ‘o‘o, and kūpuna for the lei court selection. Auntie Juliet Galuteria became the first kupuna Lei Queen.



## ISLAND OF KAHO‘OLAWE

Color: Hinahina (silvery gray)

Flower: Hinahina  
(*Heliotropium anomalum*)



Traditionally held on May 1<sup>st</sup> of each year, the Lei Court will preside over the City’s annual Lei Day Celebration at the Kapi‘olani Park. The event begins at 9:00 a.m., and ends at 5:30 p.m. Activities featured throughout the day include the Lei Exhibit which includes the most gorgeous lei in the world (1:00 to 5:30 p.m.); Tūtū’s Hale for keiki (children) and their ‘ohana (family); Royal Hawaiian Band and Hawaiian Steel Guitar concerts; Kūlana Lei (our lei village) an exhibition of Hawaiian crafts; and, craft and food vendors (times and activities are subject to change). Take advantage of our picture stops to make photo memories to share with family and friends.



## ISLAND OF KAUA‘I

Color: Poni (purple)

Flower: Mokihana  
(*Pelea anisata*)





On May 2, the contest lei will be taken to Mauna 'Ala, the Royal Mausoleum at 2261 Nu'uauu Avenue. The public is invited to this ceremony, which begins at 9:00 a.m. The lei may be viewed before the ceremony begins. As part of the ceremony, the public participates by draping the lei on the crypts and tombs of our ali'i.



### ISLAND OF NI'IIHAU

Color: Ke'oke'o (white)

Flower: Pūpū (shell;  
Ni'ihau is the only island with a shell  
not a flower/plant as its symbol.)



Mahalo nui loa to Professor Gerald Carr of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Department of Botany, for graciously allowing the City and County of Honolulu, Department of Parks and Recreation to use his and H. St. John's photographs of the island flowers. These materials are freely provided for instructional and educational purposes. Any duplication or publication of text or images as provided by Professor Gerald Carr or H. St. John herein for commercial gain without explicit written permission of the owner or photographer constitutes breach of trust and violation of copyright. For more information: <http://www.botany.hawaii.edu/faculty/carr/default.htm>

Mahalo nui loa to the Honolulu Star Advertiser for graciously allowing us to use their photograph of the first Lei Queen, Miss Nina Bowman and her court.